

Blues face hard task at unbeaten Croydon

AFTER last season's historic FA Cup run when they reached the third round for the first time in 90 years, Wycombe Wanderers start at the bottom again tomorrow (Saturday) when they face a difficult hurdle at Croydon, in the fourth qualifying round.

And there's not much doubt that Croydon will take a lot of beating at the Stadium. Looking at their form this season, they are the only unbeaten side in the Rothmans Isthmian League. They have conceded just five goals in 13 matches — the best defensive record in the RIL.

Croydon have lost only two games this season. They had an off day in the FA Trophy when they crashed 5-1 at Tonbridge while last Saturday they went down 1-0 at Bishop's Stortford in the London Senior Cup. Apart from those two games, Croydon have gone from victory to victory in both the league and the FA Cup.

To reach the fourth qualifying round they have beaten Erith and Belvedere 3-1 away after a 1-1 home draw, Bromley 2-1 and Molesey 4-0.

Croydon, who dropped the Amateurs title three seasons

ago, have only one injury problem. Bernie Merron hurt a shoulder in the recent 1-0 win over Tilbury and is very doubtful. Cliff Gould, an 18 year old youngster who scored the winner against Tilbury, could take his place.

Apart from Merron, Croydon should be able to field their regular side tomorrow. It includes several former Isthmian League Division One players, amongst them Dave Cobb, the goalkeeper, and Adrian Hill. They played for Tooting and Kingstonian respectively in Division One.

Croydon feel this cup tie could be won for or lost in mid-field and they will be looking to Brian Woolley to swing the balance for them in this department. Up front, the chief dangerman is Cliff Hall, who played for Charlton in the Football League at the age of 16. A fast and skilful left winger, Hall will need careful attention.

Wycombe manager Brian Lee and his assistant John Reardon have both watched Croydon at different times recently and realise what they have to do if the club are to go into the first round draw on Monday. They will be hoping for a full strength squad and much will depend on the fitness of players after Wednesday's game at Oxford. Both skipper John Delaney and striker Geoff Anthony have been troubled by injuries in the last week. One player who will not be with the team is Tommy James. He has left the squad and signed on for Southall after a brief stay at Loakes Park.

Should a replay be necessary after tomorrow's match, it will be staged at Loakes Park on Tuesday evening (kick off 7.30 p.m.).